

VERMONT LEGAL AID, INC.

OFFICE OF THE HEALTH CARE ADVOCATE

264 NORTH WINOOSKI AVE. - P.O. Box 1367
BURLINGTON, VERMONT 05402
(800) 917-7787 (VOICE AND TTY)
FAX (802) 863-7152
(802) 863-2316

OFFICES:

BURLINGTON
RUTLAND
ST. JOHNSBURY

OFFICES:

MONTPELIER
SPRINGFIELD

HEALTH CARE ADVOCATE FUNDING FOR SFY 2016

Trinka Kerr, Chief Health Care Advocate

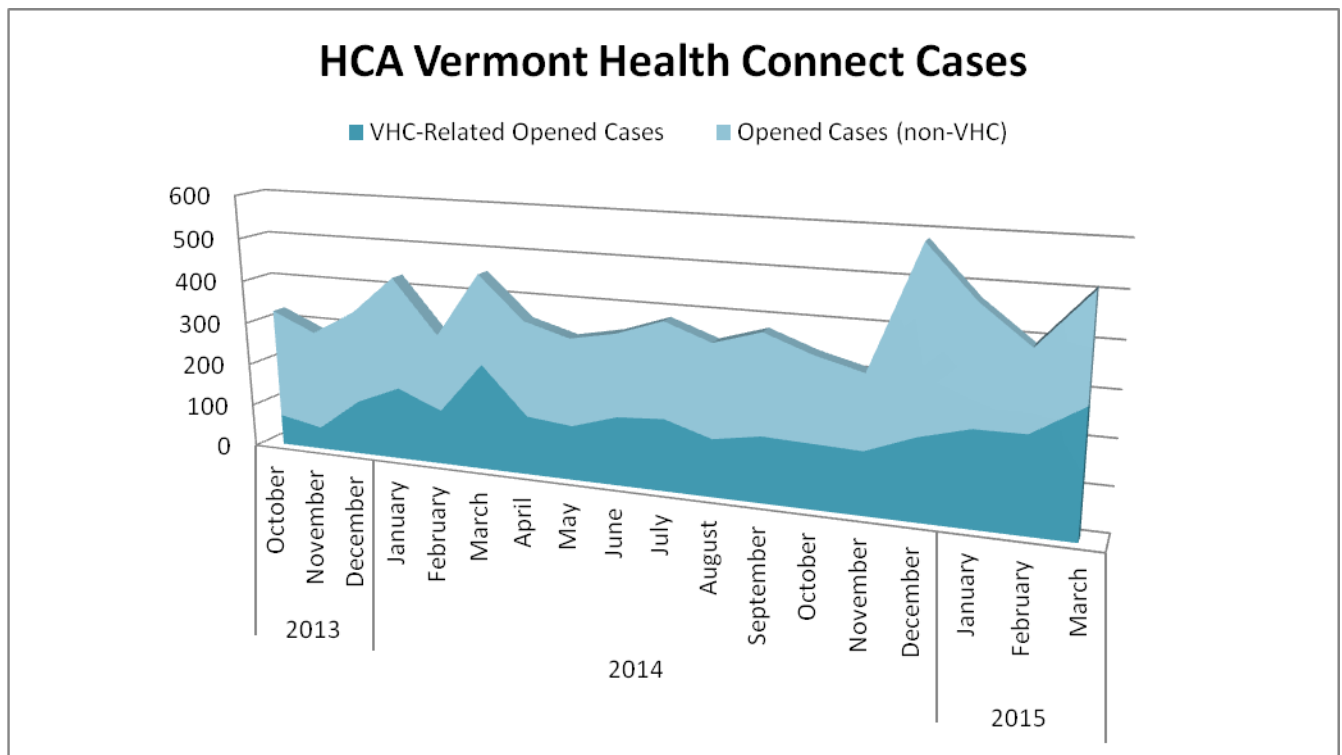
April 16, 2015

The Office of the Health Care Advocate:

- Assists individual Vermonters with health insurance and health care issues through our statewide hotline and our website (www.vtlawhelp.org/health), and
- Advocates on behalf of the public on health care policy issues before the Green Mountain Care Board (GMCB), other state agencies, and the legislature.

The need for individual consumer assistance has increased dramatically.

- Our call volume has hit record levels every month for over a year as a result of the problems related to Vermont Health Connect, and continues to go up.
- We do not anticipate a significant call volume decrease for at least a year, and then would expect a steady decline over the following several years, absent any radical changes in state policy.
- It took three years for call volume to drop significantly after Medicare Part D began.



The Office of the Health Care Advocate, previously named the Office of Health Care Ombudsman, is a special project of Vermont Legal Aid.

The need for consumer protection and public policy advocacy on behalf of Vermont health care consumers has increased.

- In addition to representing the public in rate review, certificate of need and hospital budget proceedings before the GMCB, the HCA now participates in many of the Vermont Health Care Innovation Project work groups to make sure there is a strong consumer voice in the many health care payment and delivery reform initiatives.
- As the GMCB's responsibilities expand, so do the HCA's.
- As the GMCB's staff is increased, the HCA's should at least be maintained.

The Governor's SFY 2016 budget for the HCA creates a \$40,000 shortfall.

- Section 8 of H. 481 includes the additional \$40,000 needed for SFY 2016.
- The amount the HCA needs **to maintain current staffing** is \$1,458,285.
- The Governor's recommended amount is \$1,418,122, which is in H. 490.
- Our contract is administered by the Agency of Administration.
- Our funding is complicated, and comes from multiple sources, some of which fluctuate year to year:
 - Department of Vermont Health Access
 - Department of Financial Regulation
 - Vermont Health Connect
 - Billback from hospitals and insurers through the Green Mountain Care Board
 - Federal rate review grant through the GMCB
 - Federal Consumer Assistance Program grant through DFR (ends in the fall)
- Last year we also had a shortfall, and part of that was made up by carry forward of \$75,000 from the previous year.
- This year there is no carry forward, and the amount AoA cobbled together is \$40,000 short of what we need.